Frequently, too, they were on heights overlooking the fields, out of the way of floods and more easily defended than on the plain. In these villages the life of the community centered around market places and public grounds.

It was in the spring, before the workers went to the fields, that the mating of young couples seems to have taken place. There were great community festivals in the spring and in the autumn when the entire village gave itself over to dancing and ceremonials.

Agriculture and the life of the peasantry were carefully regulated and directed by officials, so that China early possessed a kind of bureaucracy.

The aristocracy were chiefly distinguished from the peasants by an elaborate family and hierarchal organization. Each patrician clan professed to trace its descent through the male line to a common ancestor—a god, a hero, or a monarch. Sometimes the original progenitor was supposed to be a bird or an animal. These latter were often purely mythical creatures, such as the unicorn and the dragon. The men were careful nqt to take wives, or even concubines, of their own clan name. However, two houses often intermarried for many generations, and sons customarily obtained wives from their mother's family. Then, too, children of a brother and sister might marry—being of different clan names. The clan was not a territorial division and did not necessarily hold land as a unit. The effective tie was not economic but religious—the cult in honor of the ancestors and especially of the putative founder of the clan. The family organization contained interesting survivals of what was possibly a much earlier matriarchate. If, as seems possible, in primitive times the chil-

dren received their mother's name and husbands were joined to their wives[3] families, by at least the time of the feudal system the organization of the aristocracy had become clearly patriarchal. The aristocratic clan in turn was divided into families, each with its male head who officially represented and had authority over its members. Marriage, being the means of perpetuating the family and the clan, was of great importance and by elaborate rites. At the time of the marriage the bride was formally introduced to her husband's parents and ancestors. Secondary wives might be taken. A birth was regarded as lucky or unlucky